

“In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.” (Romans 7: 4)

The death Paul speaks of here, is the death we experienced with Christ in our baptisms. His death on the cross, became our death to the law. Since sin can no longer hold us back from the kingdom of God, then the law also cannot be used to keep us from the King.

Now we do not have to worry and lose sleep over whether we are good enough to enter the kingdom of God. We no longer have to do certain good deeds to prove (to the church hierarchy, or anyone else) that we are good enough. Jesus makes us good enough.

So, Paul asks is the law a bad thing. Of course not he argues with himself.

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”(Romans 7: 7)

If I break a commandment or sin by causing harm to a neighbor, or myself, then it is the sin (that universal sin or condition of sin) that is in all humanity that caused the wrong. The law and the commandment, simply points to the right way, my sin shows that I am incapable of doing the right thing. That does not make the law wrong. It does show that I am a sinner.

Now there are those who love the up arrow, and believe that sanctification is only proven when the human lives the proper type of life. They would say, “You must show that your baptism was legitimate by exhibiting holy traits. You must prove that Jesus died for you by being more and more like Jesus.” This is called, by some, “Progressive Sanctification”. They would claim that living a life worthy of Jesus is essential to being sanctified. I would join Paul in saying: By no means.

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” (Romans 6: 15)

That sin, and my ability to use it, is always at hand. It does not go away. I am a sinner, I cannot pretend to be anything else. If sanctification comes only to the good and sinless, I have no hope. So what can we say to this.

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”. (Romans 7: 21 - 25) PERIOD.



For Whom Christ Died

A 21st Century Approach to:
The Letter of Paul to the Romans
By: Rev. David L. Stoner



A Man Of Many Titles

If you are privileged to live long enough, you will attain many different titles that define you. Some will be professional, like secretary, boss, doctor, or teacher. Others can be personal, like Mom, sister or Grandfather. And then there are titles that explain what it is you do, artist, athlete, musician, or carpenter.

As I think back over my life, I believe the number of titles I’ve accumulated has become an astronomical number, (meaning too big to count). Some of these titles I cherish; (Son, Husband, Dad, Pastor), others I’ll spend the rest of my life trying to forget and forgive; (Liar, Angry, Bias, Judgmental).

One title, however, stands alone and above the rest...Wretched. I will not go to my grave because I am a Wretched Man. Rather I will live in paradise precisely because I am a Wretched Man. Thanks Be To God. You too?

Romans 6: 20 - 23

“When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Over the years I have noticed, if you want to get a group of pastors, in any denomination or mix there of, to have a knock down drag out fight, simply throw out the word “Sanctification.” Boom, before you can say, “thanks be to God for Jesus Christ” a fist fight has already broken out.

Okay, I’ve never actually seen a fist fight, but I have observed something far worse. Colleagues who have shared mission and ministry for years, never speak to each other again.

Part of the problem, one side wants to tie righteousness, in with the word sanctify. The other side of the problem is that they do not.

As a pastor of the church, a large part of my job is to help you fall in love with Jesus. I have found that the place to begin this love story is to tell you that Jesus has always loved you. But, in this day and age, that is a hard place to start, because most of us have been told that Jesus does not love us, and for the most part we have been convinced that we are indeed unloveable.

You see, years ago the church (hierarchy) made a decision that free love of Jesus couldn’t sell. That decision led to another, the only way to make Jesus work for the church was to scare Jesus out of the people by convincing them that only the church could save sinners (people) from Jesus. This worked so well, that people became devoted to the church and hardly thought of Jesus at all. Perhaps that story even sounds a little familiar to you?

Sanctify, is a word that implies “the making of something...Sanctify evidently means to make sanctus or holy, and means the process of being made or becoming holy.” (“A Theological Word Book of the Bible” Edited by: Alan Richardson, 1950 MacMillan Press, p. 216)

Now the question has always been, how does one become holy. After all holiness is from the realm of God. Humanity does not have an inborn sense holy. Only God is holy, or of holiness. So in some sense, the making of holy is and can only be done by God. But for some that seemed to let humans off the hook. If only God participates in the holy, then human beings cannot aid in holy development. Evidently there are many who believe that helping God make them holy by actually believing they are holy and better than others is a virtue.

Here in lies the controversy - sanctify is a word that implies the making of something - holy. If the process itself is a godly process, then the process must have a formula. For some the formula was simple, God gave the gift of sanctification which means eternal life. For others the formula was difficult, One part God’s gift, plus two parts of human acceptance, plus three parts of human purity, equals eternal life. (God’s Gift + Human Acceptance + Human Good Life = Eternal Life). That sounds more complicated than it really is. The picture in the top right hand corner is more to the point. Some say God came down to earth to save humanity (period). While others say God has given humanity a chance to prove they are worth saving. Can you guess which symbol represents which formula?

Please. let me be as clear as possible. Any attempt to earn, scratch, claw, or climb our way to sanctification, attempts to diminish the cross of Jesus and empowers the human endeavor to prove it can indeed build a tower (ziggurat) to the glory of God. This babbling non-sense must end.

St. Paul is correct, **“...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6: 23)** Nothing, you or I or anyone else in all history or future can do to turn this free gift into something earned. Jesus has done this for one and all. The law has been fulfilled and death has lost it’s sting.

